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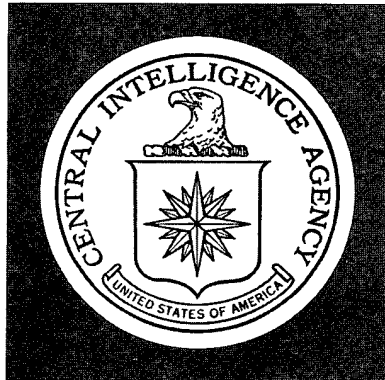
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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Informations as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

In northeastern Quang Tri Province, Communist artillery bombarded allied installations and US Marines reported almost continuous ground contact with enemy units.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Heavy fighting over the weekend resulted in more than 550 enemy soldiers killed near the DMZ (Paras. 1-5). Seventeen Americans were wounded by a terrorist mine which exploded near a US barracks in Saigon (Paras. 6-7).

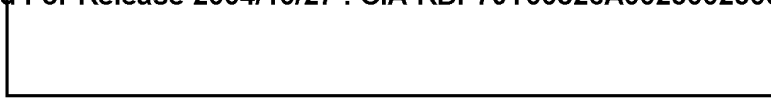
II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The government apparently intends to disqualify Au Truong Thanh, the "peace candidate," as a presidential candidate (Paras. 1-3). Viet Cong plans to disrupt the elections for the presidency and the Assembly (Para. 4).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:

The number of reports describing desertions from NVA units infiltrating South is increasing (Paras. 5-9).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.



ANNEX:

Death of Politburo Member Nguyen Chi Thanh
Poses Problems for Hanoi.

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. In addition to a series of ground clashes which resulted in reported enemy losses of more than 550 killed, artillery, rocket, and mortar duels between North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and US Marines were reported in the eastern DMZ area over the weekend.

2. US Marines participating in the seven-battalion Operation BUFFALO reported almost continuous contact with enemy troops in the northeastern part of Quang Tri Province near Con Thien and Dong Ha on 8-9 July. The Marines were supported by heavy US air and artillery strikes which, in part, accounted for the high enemy casualty toll.

3. The Communist troops also continued their bombardment of allied installations south of the DMZ. The first reported use of the Soviet-built 152-mm. self-propelled guns, with a range of 17 miles, was reported on 9 July. This long-range weapon is capable of striking allied targets as far south as Camp Carroll and Dong Ha from firing positions within the DMZ and North Vietnam.

4. Since the heavy fighting began in the eastern DMZ area on 2 July, a total of 143 Americans have been killed and another 738 wounded. Cumulative Communist losses now total 973 killed as a result of the week-long fighting.

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Saigon Terrorism

6. Viet Cong terrorists exploded a Claymore-type mine near the Capitol Hotel--now converted into the

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largest US military barracks in Saigon--late on 9 July. Two South Vietnamese civilians were killed and 19 others wounded; a total of 17 Americans were wounded by the blast.

7. This incident was the largest of a flurry of terror and sabotage efforts by the Viet Cong which included several attempts to blow up vital oil pipelines. These incidents coincided with the visit to South Vietnam of high-level US officials, and have taken a toll of more than ten South Vietnamese civilians killed and 22 wounded during the past week.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The government apparently has laid the groundwork for the disqualification of Au Truong Thanh, the self-styled "peace candidate" in the presidential election. A formal complaint was filed against Thanh on 6 July by a National Assembly deputy closely associated with the ruling Directorate. The complaint, which was accorded substantial publicity in Saigon this weekend, alleges that Thanh has a long history of association with pro-Communist activities. It charges that Thanh's tenure as minister for national economy was spent implementing "Marxist-Leninist" policies in an effort to sabotage the nation's economy, and calls for his disqualification under the provision of the election law which disallows the candidacy of anyone who "directly or indirectly...worked in the interest of Communism."

2. The government also moved to discredit Thanh by linking his name to the recent arrest of allegedly pro - Viet Cong intellectuals in Saigon. The arrest of the intellectuals, who apparently were associated with the intellectual proselytizing section (IPS) of the Saigon Communist organization, was announced by the police at a 7 July press conference. A police spokesman asserted that Thanh and several other well-known politicians would have to answer for their roles in the IPS.

3. A number of Thanh's former associates are now taking pains to disassociate themselves from him, and there is a widespread sentiment in the National Assembly and among the military that Thanh has gone too far in pushing his "peace at any price" line. The US Embassy believes that the government's campaign against Thanh is also meant as a warning to other presidential and assembly candidates that discussion of the peace issue must be kept within acceptable limits.

Viet Cong Plans to Disrupt Elections

4. The Viet Cong is moving ahead with plans to disrupt the September elections. [REDACTED]

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[redacted] the Viet Cong is training special cadres in Quang Nam Province for antielection activities. The Communists reportedly intend to dispatch some of the cadre into cities and district towns in order to step-up terrorism and create confusion during the election period. The cadre will also be used to establish contact with antigovernment elements in an effort to promote demonstrations against the elections. [redacted] the Communists are making similar plans in other provinces, including Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, and Ba Xuyen in the delta.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

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Desertions of NVA regulars in South Vietnam

5. There are tenuous indications that desertions may be becoming a significant problem for North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units in South Vietnam. Until recently there was little indication that NVA regulars defected in significant numbers either in South Vietnam or during infiltration through Laos.

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6. In recent months, however, an increasing number of POWs have described desertions from their units both during infiltration and after being assigned to combat units in South Vietnam. One prisoner [redacted]

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[redacted] reported that ten members of his group deserted during infiltration. Another prisoner reported that his cousin--a truck driver for the NVA over the infiltration routes in Laos--had gotten into serious trouble because he had been caught transporting eight deserters (whom he had picked up in South Vietnam) on his empty truck run back to North Vietnam. Other recent MACV reports suggest that there are a significant number of desertions in NVA units during infiltration. A member of the 324th Division reported that 15 men out of his 170-man group deserted; another soldier reported that 26 out of his 52-man group deserted.

7. It is possible that such desertions have been a significant problem for some time but are only now being reported. It is also possible, however, that the increase in reporting reflects an increase in the desertion rate. Such an increase could be related to an expansion of DRV recruitment policies in which the government is having to draw from elements of the population which are less dedicated to regime objectives, less capable of accepting the rigors of infiltrations, and less willing to accept combat assignments in the South.

8. Although there is no hard evidence that North Vietnam is experiencing any shortage of military manpower, there have been isolated reports which suggest a broadening of the base used to recruit men for the South. Some prisoners captured in the South as well as ralliers have indicated resentment about their combat assignment, claiming that the regime is cutting down on draft exemptions granted for reasons of family support, and that the government has stopped providing support allowances for dependents. One deserter was from the group of Vietnamese repatriated from Thailand--a group which the DRV has always considered politically suspect. Another report, as yet unconfirmed, claims that North Vietnam has lowered the draft age to sixteen.

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9. Although these reports are isolated and inconclusive, they do indicate that Hanoi is dipping into groups which are not as dedicated to regime objectives as earlier infiltrators may have been. If recruiting from such groups is widespread it could increase the desertion rate among North Vietnamese regulars in South Vietnam.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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ANNEX

Death of Politburo Member Nguyen Chi Thanh
Poses Some Problems for North Vietnam

The sudden death of Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh poses two immediate and important problems for the Hanoi leadership: his replacement both as head of the Communist apparatus in South Vietnam and on the policy making party politburo. Nguyen Chi Thanh's combined military background and political experience will make him difficult to replace in both positions. He was the only individual besides General Vo Nguyen Giap to hold the rank of senior general in the armed forces, and he was a leading member of the militant wing of the North Vietnamese politburo. As a member of the party secretariat and the Party Military Committee, he had a voice in two of the party's most important organizations.

In South Vietnam there are already more than half a dozen high-ranking North Vietnamese general officers currently in command positions who could take over effective direction of the war effort, but they hold only central committee status at the most. Thus, they would be unable to speak with the authority of Nguyen Chi Thanh on political objectives and on matters of strategy and tactics relating to the war.

During his two-year tour in South Vietnam, Thanh is believed to have performed the task of over-all field commander--with decision making authority in both the planning and implementation of the strategy and deployment of Communist forces. Thanh's assignment in the South in early 1965 was probably prompted by Communist optimism that one final military push against ARVN forces would bring their revolution to a successful conclusion. The leadership wanted a man on the spot who could pull this military victory off and speak with politburo authority in subsequent political developments. Thanh was apparently hand-picked for this job by party First Secretary Le Duan--the principal architect of revolutionary strategy in the South. Thanh had the political rank to assume direction of this revolution, he had extensive experience in military affairs and the highest military rank, and he was philosophically in tune with Le Duan's choice of militant and aggressive solutions to important Communist problems.

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Almost immediately after his reported departure to the South, for example, Nguyen Chi Thanh began a build-up of main force Viet Cong units (with both an increased infiltration of organic NVA units and by an upgrading and transfer of local guerrilla units). He believed this strategy would prove successful, after the introduction of US forces in the South, arguing that large unit actions were the only way to meet the new threat. The employment of this strategy in the fight against US forces, however, generated significant opposition in the high councils of the North Vietnamese party, and a debate over Nguyen Chi Thanh's concepts was reflected in important party journals in mid-1966. Opposition apparently came both from old-time Viet Cong guerrilla leaders and from members of the regular military establishment in the North, probably led by Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap, who argued for more emphasis on the traditional Vietnamese mix of conventional and guerrilla tactics. The opposition saw Thanh's approach as putting a strain on manpower resources in both the North and the South. It robbed local guerrilla units of their capacity to tie down and harass allied forces, and it also required the infiltration of regular North Vietnamese units at a rapid rate and in significantly increased numbers. Thanh was apparently given the forces he asked for in 1965 and early 1966, but the inability of these forces successfully to counter US military operations seriously undercut his thesis. By the fall of 1966, Vietnamese military discussions of the proper conduct of the war were emphasizing the importance of guerrilla tactics and urging a more balanced use of main force and local units in the war with the Americans--an apparent compromise between Thanh and his opponents. Thanh remained commander of the Communist forces in South Vietnam and as late as 31 May he published an authoritative commentary on the war in the South.

Assuming that the politburo will replace Thanh with someone of nearly comparable status, only a few men would appear to be likely candidates. Le Duc Tho, the sixth ranking member of the politburo, is a former deputy commander of Viet Cong forces, serving under Le Duan in the war against France. For the last ten years or more he has been holding the

important post of chief of the Party Organization Department which controls the party in South Vietnam as well as in the North. He was chosen to head the funeral committee for Nguyen Chi Thanh and is known to be a hard-liner and close to Le Duan.

Another possible candidate, because of his former experience in the South, is Pham Hung, a Viet Cong leader who came North in 1954. He is the number five man on the politburo. Since 1954, however, Hung has devoted his primary and almost exclusive attention to the fiscal management of the DRV economy and is regarded as a follower of Pham Van Dong rather than Le Duan. General Van Tien Dung, chief of staff of the North Vietnamese Army, is an alternate member of the politburo and also served in South Vietnam previously.

Thanh's death not only poses a problem in relation to the top spot in South Vietnam, it also raises the question of replacing him on the politburo. This is the first time since at least 1960 that an opening has occurred on the governing body of the party. Thanh's career over the past ten years was very closely tied to Le Duan--party first secretary, number two man in politburo rank after Ho Chi Minh, and leader of the more militant element in the North Vietnamese leadership. Thanh's promotion to senior general occurred in the late 1950s shortly after Le Duan moved into the number two slot in the party. Although Thanh was removed as head of the army's political departments in 1961--apparently after significant differences with Defense Minister Giap--he re-emerged two years later into the mainstream of party affairs to provide the cutting edge of another of Le Duan's policies--a shift away from traditional Vietnamese neutrality in the Sino-Soviet dispute toward support of Peking. Although all of the politburo eventually and apparently with some reluctance endorsed this move Nguyen Chi Thanh was the first and most outspoken in the use of Chinese style invectives in criticizing the Soviet "revisionists."

Thanh also has a long history of opposition to the recognized moderates in the party. He

challenged Defense Minister Giap in the late 1950s as head of the important political department of the army and as the only man beside Giap to hold the rank of senior general. The two men apparently disagreed over the role of the army during peace time--Giap arguing for the development of a professional military army and Thanh pushing to use the military as a political and economic force to promote social reform, particularly in agriculture. This argument appears to have been resolved ultimately in Giap's favor, since in 1961 Thanh was removed as head of the army's political department.

The kinds of differences which have separated Giap and Nguyen Chi Thanh over the years are believed to reflect fundamental differences within the entire North Vietnamese politburo. Thanh's death could compound those differences. If the leadership intends to replace him immediately, General Giap and those who think like him will most certainly urge a replacement more in tune with his own more moderate pragmatic philosophy. Le Duan, on the other hand, will be equally eager to replace Thanh with another militant on whom he can count for strong support. If Thanh is not replaced immediately (as frequently happens in positions of this nature in Communist hierarchies) his loss could still affect the relatively even balance in the politburo. With Thanh alive, the 11-man politburo was probably pretty evenly divided along militant/moderate lines: five militants (led by Le Duan), five moderates (led by Pham Van Dong) and Ho Chi Minh standing above both groups as final arbiter. Although not all issues find the politburo divided along these lines, such divisions are believed to be characteristic of many of the important hard decisions that the leadership makes in pursuing its national objectives.

The politburo could be expanded by the addition of one or several members. Alternate politburo member Van Tien Dung is probably the most likely candidate to be elevated to full politburo membership. Dung is regarded as a Giap man, and his status as a

military professional might work against him. The party would be careful not to weigh the politburo too heavily with military candidates.

Other central committee members present themselves as likely candidates for politburo membership by virtue of their active and prominent role in party affairs. To Huu is a possibility because of his position on the party secretariat. He would probably satisfy Le Duan's requirements for a hard-liner. Xuan Thuy, the director of the party's foreign relations department--although removed as government minister of foreign affairs a few years ago for reasons of health--has become extremely active in the foreign affairs again and could be considered politburo material.

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